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SEDGWICK COUNTY, KANSAS  
COMMUNICATIONS

# NEWS

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Extreme Heat Alert for Older Adults

(Sedgwick County, Kansas) – As temperatures rise in the summer months, so do the number of older adults at risk for heat exposure, heat stroke, and other heat related illnesses. According to the Center for Disease Control - National Center for Environmental Health (CDC), between 1979 and 1999 extreme heat exposure caused 8,015 deaths. On average, 400 heat-related deaths occur every year (compared to the 200 other weather related death that occur due to tornados, flood, and lightening) and 53% of heat related deaths are older adults.

Studies have shown that a significant rise in heat related problems occur following extreme heat that lasts for more than two consecutive days. Heat related illness occurs when an individual's body is unable to cool itself. The body cools itself through sweating but during extreme heat and humidity sweating may not be enough. Sweat is not evaporated as quickly when humidity levels are high, this makes it difficult for the body to release heat. According to the CDC, other factors that decrease the body's ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather include: age (children and older adults are at higher risk), obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, high blood pressure, mental illness, poor circulation, sunburn, and prescription drug and alcohol use.

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An older person may have an increased risk of heat related illness if they are living alone or have no assistance from family or friends. Financial constraints may prevent them from using or repairing their air conditioner or fans. Fear of crime may also prevent some from opening windows and doors.

Becoming familiar with the warning signs of heat related illness will help you protect older adults in your family and neighborhood.

Warning signs include:

- Labored breathing or pounding heart
- Headache and/or painful muscle spasms
- Nausea and excessive sweating
- Dizziness, feeling faint
- Darker colored urine
- Urinating infrequently

The best defense is prevention. Here are some tips on preventing and managing heat:

- Drink more fluids regardless of your activity level.
- Avoid drinks that include caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar.
- Stay in doors. If you or someone you know does not have an air conditioner there are some places to go during extreme heat such as: a public library, senior centers, a shopping mall or a friend or family member's home – even a few hours can assist your body to remain cooler.
- Electric fans will help but when the heat is in the 90s, fans are not extremely helpful. Taking a cool shower or bath or finding an air-conditioned location will provide the body the needed relief from the heat.
- Wear light colored, loose fitting, and lightweight clothing.
- NEVER leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle.

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During this summer's extreme heat please take a few extra minutes to check on older adults in your life several times a day. Also, encourage them to follow the Tips on Preventing and Managing Heat. For information on services available to older adults in Sedgwick, Harvey and Butler Counties contact Central Plains Area Agency on Aging at 660-5120 or (800)367-7298.

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